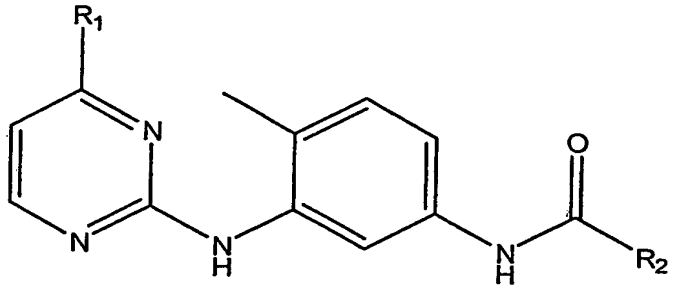
We claim:

1. A compound of the formula (I)



(I)

wherein

R_1 is a phenyl radical or a heteroaryl radical; and

R_2 is a phenyl radical;

or an N-oxide or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

2. A compound of formula I wherein R_1 is selected from a phenyl radical, a thiazolyl radical, a pyrazinyl radical, a pyrimidinyl radical or a pyridyl radical.

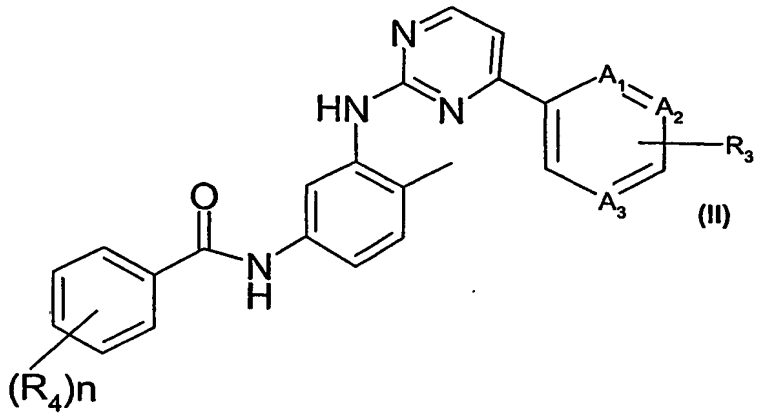
3. A compound of claim 2 wherein R_2 is phenyl that is substituted in at least the 3-position by halogen, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino; lower alkyl; halo-lower alkyl; lower alkoxy; halo-lower alkoxy; lower alkylthio; or halo-lower alkylthio.

4. A compound of claim 3 wherein R_2 is phenyl that is substituted in at least the 3-position by fluorine, halo-lower alkyl, halo-lower alkoxy, or halo-lower alkylthio.

5. A compound of claim 1 wherein R_1 is a phenyl, 2-thiazolyl, 2-pyrazinyl, 5-pyrimidinyl or 3-pyridyl radical.

6. A compound of claim 5 wherein R_2 is phenyl that is substituted in at least the 3-position by fluorine, halo-lower alkyl, halo-lower alkoxy, or halo-lower alkylthio.

7. A compound of claim 1 of formula II



(II)

wherein

n is 0, 1 or 2;

A_1, A_2 and A_3 are C, or A_1 and A_2 are C and A_3 is N, or A_1 and A_3 are N and A_2 is C, or A_1 is C and A_2 and A_3 are N;

R_3 is $-NR_5R_6$, halogen, $-O-R_8$, $-S-R_8$, or lower alkyl which is unsubstituted or substituted by halogen, hydroxy, lower alkoxy, $-NR_7R_8$, or a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon;

R_4 is amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino, wherein the alkyl groups are unsubstituted or substituted by halogen or lower alkoxy; halogen, lower alkyl, halo-lower alkyl, lower alkoxy, halo-lower alkoxy, hydroxy, lower alkanoyl, carbamoyl, N-mono- or N,N-di-substituted carbamoyl, mercapto, lower alkylthio or halo-lower alkylthio;

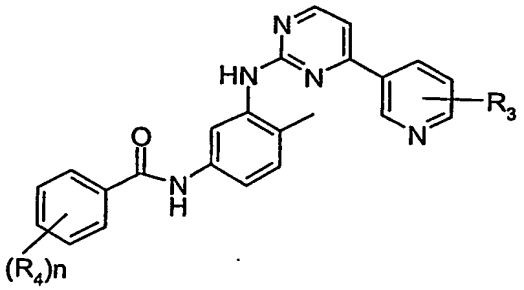
R_5, R_6, R_7 and R_8 are independently hydrogen, a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon, lower alkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl-lower alkylene, lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy, a heteroaryl radical, a heterocyclic radical, amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl amino or R_5 and R_6 or R_7 and R_8 together with the nitrogen form a heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical;

R_8 is a heterocyclic radical, a heteroaromatic radical, heteroaryl-lower-alkylene, heterocyclic-lower-alkylene, lower alkyl or lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy or $-NR_7R_8$;

or an N-oxide or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

8. A compound of claim 7 wherein R_2 is phenyl that is substituted in at least the 3-position by halogen, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino; lower alkyl; halo-lower alkyl; lower alkoxy; halo-lower alkoxy; lower alkylthio; or halo-lower alkylthio.

9. A compound of claim 1 of formula (III)



(III)

wherein

n is 0, 1 or 2;

R_3 is $-NR_5R_6$, halogen, $-O-R_8$, $-S-R_8$, or lower alkyl which is unsubstituted or substituted by halogen, hydroxy, lower alkoxy, $-NR_7R_8$, or a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon;

R_4 is amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino, wherein the alkyl groups are unsubstituted or substituted by halogen or lower alkoxy; halogen, lower alkyl, halo-lower alkyl, lower alkoxy, halo-lower alkoxy, hydroxy, lower alkanoyl, carbamoyl, N-mono- or N,N-di-substituted carbamoyl, mercapto, lower alkylthio or halo-lower alkylthio;

R_5, R_6, R_7 and R_8 are independently hydrogen, a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon, lower alkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl-lower alkylene, lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy, a heteroaryl radical, a heterocyclic radical, amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl amino or R_5 and R_6 or R_7 and R_8 together with the nitrogen form a heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical;

R_8 is a heterocyclic radical, a heteroaromatic radical, heteroaryl-lower-alkylene, heterocyclic-lower-alkylene, lower alkyl or lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy or $-NR_7R_8$;

or an N-oxide or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

10. A compound of claim 9 wherein R_4 is halogen, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino; lower alkyl; halo-lower alkyl; lower alkoxy; halo-lower alkoxy; lower alkylthio; or halo-lower alkylthio.

11. A compound of claim 10 wherein R_4 is phenyl halo-lower alkyl, halo-lower alkoxy or halo-lower alkylthio.

12. A compound of claim 9 wherein R_4 is trifluoromethyl.

13. A compound of claim 9 wherein R_3 is $-NR_5R_6$ and one of R_5 and R_6 is lower alkyl substituted by $-NR_7R_8$ and R_7 and R_8 together with the nitrogen form a heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical.

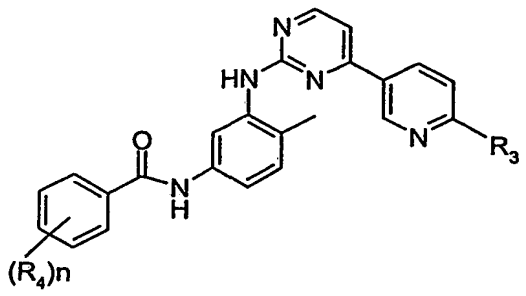
14. A compound of claim 13 wherein the heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical is selected from morphilino, thiomorphilino, piperazinyl, piperidinyl, and pyridyl.

15. A compound of claim wherein $-NR_5R_6$ is a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical.

16. A compound of claim 15 wherein $-NR_5R_6$ is a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical selected from piperazinyl, 4-methylpiperazinyl, piperidinyl, 4-hydroxypiperidinyl, morphilino and thiomorphilino.

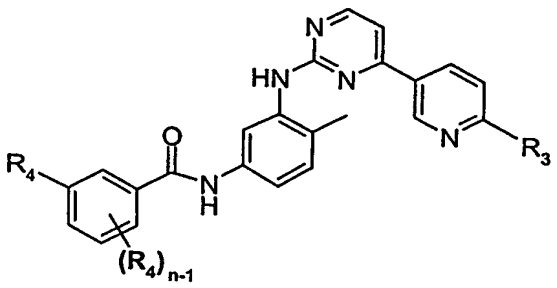
17. A compound of claim 9 wherein R_8 is lower alkyl, lower alkyl substituted by hydroxy or lower alkoxy, or a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical.

18. A compound of claim 9 of formula (IIIa)



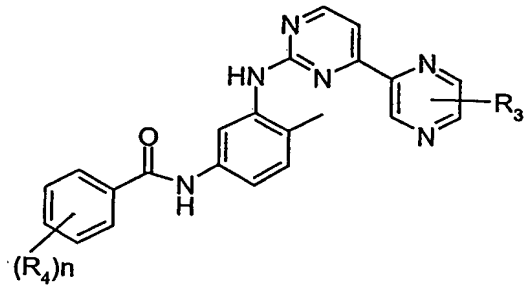
(IIIa)

19. A compound of claim 9 of formula IIIb



(IIIb)

20. A compound of claim 7 of formula IV



(IV)

wherein

n is 0, 1 or 2;

R_3 is hydrogen, $-NR_5R_6$, halogen, $-O-R_8$, $-S-R_8$, or lower alkyl which is unsubstituted or substituted by halogen, hydroxy, lower alkoxy, $-NR_7R_8$, or a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon;

R_4 is amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino, wherein the alkyl groups are unsubstituted or substituted by halogen or lower alkoxy; halogen, lower alkyl, halo-lower alkyl, lower alkoxy, halo-lower alkoxy, hydroxy, lower alkanoyl, carbamoyl, N-mono- or N,N-di-substituted carbamoyl, mercapto, lower alkylthio or halo-lower alkylthio;

R_5, R_6, R_7 and R_8 are independently hydrogen, a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon, lower alkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl-lower alkylene, lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy, a heteroaryl radical, a heterocyclic radical, amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl amino or R_5 and R_6 or R_7 and R_8 together with the nitrogen form a heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical;

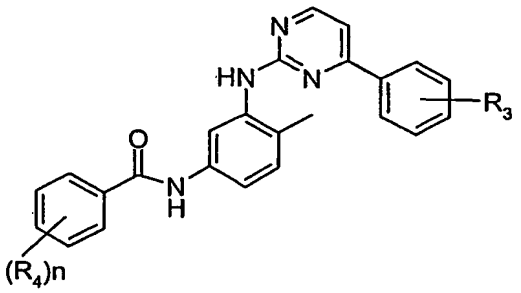
R_8 is a heterocyclic radical, a heteroaromatic radical, heteroaryl-lower-alkylene, heterocyclic-lower-alkylene, lower alkyl or lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy or $-NR_7R_8$;

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

21. A compound of claim 20 wherein R_4 is halogen, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino; lower alkyl; halo-lower alkyl; lower alkoxy; halo-lower alkoxy; lower alkylthio; or halo-lower alkylthio.

22. A compound of claim 21 wherein at least one R4 substituent is in the meta position relative to the carbonyl.

23. A compound of claim 7 of the formula (V)



(V)

wherein

n is 0, 1 or 2;

R_3 is $-NR_5R_6$, halogen, $-O-R_8$, $-S-R_8$, or lower alkyl which is unsubstituted or substituted by halogen, hydroxy, lower alkoxy, $-NR_7R_8$, or a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon;

R_4 is amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino, wherein the alkyl groups are unsubstituted or substituted by halogen or lower alkoxy; halogen, lower alkyl, halo-lower alkyl, lower alkoxy, halo-lower alkoxy, hydroxy, lower alkanoyl, carbamoyl, N-mono- or N,N-di-substituted carbamoyl, mercapto, lower alkylthio or halo-lower alkylthio;

R_5, R_6, R_7 and R_8 are independently hydrogen, a heteroaryl or heterocyclic radical attached at a ring carbon, lower alkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl-lower alkylene, lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy, a heteroaryl radical, a heterocyclic radical, amino, mono- or di-lower alkyl amino or R_5 and R_6 or R_7 and R_8 together with the nitrogen form a heteroaromatic or heterocyclic radical;

R_8 is a heterocyclic radical, a heteroaromatic radical, heteroaryl-lower-alkylene, heterocyclic-lower-alkylene, lower alkyl or lower alkyl which is substituted by hydroxy, lower alkoxy or $-NR_7R_8$;
or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

24. A compound of claim 23 wherein R_4 is halogen, mono- or di-lower alkyl-substituted amino; lower alkyl; halo-lower alkyl; lower alkoxy; halo-lower alkoxy; lower alkylthio; or halo-lower alkylthio.

25. A compound of claim 24 wherein at least one R4 substituent is in the meta position relative to the carbonyl.

26. A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (I) according to claim 1.

27 A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (II) according to claim 7.

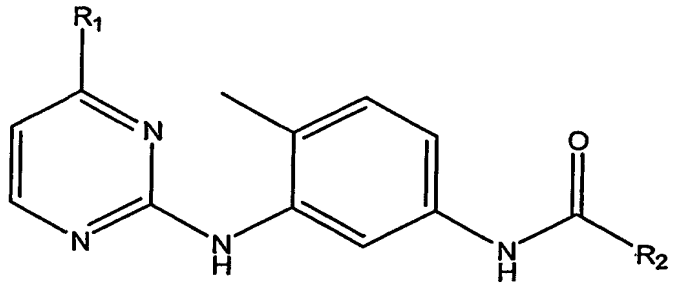
28. A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (III) according to claim 9.

28. A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (IIIb) according to claim 19.

29. A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (IV) according to claim 20.

30. A method of treating a patient having a disease characterized by excessive signaling through the MAP kinase signaling pathway, which comprises administering to the patient an effective RAF kinase inhibiting amount of a compound of formula (V) according to claim 23.

31. A process for the preparation of a compound of the formula (I),



(I)

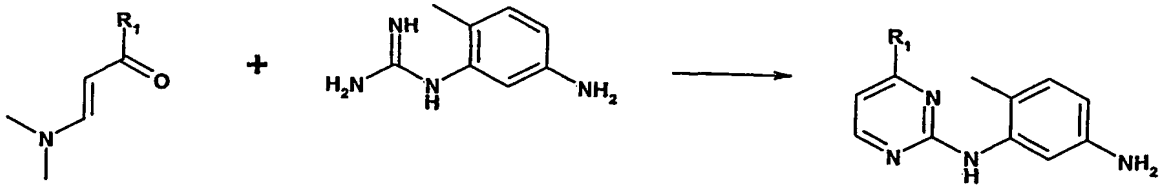
wherein

R_1 is a phenyl radical or a heteroaryl radical; and

R_2 is a phenyl radical;

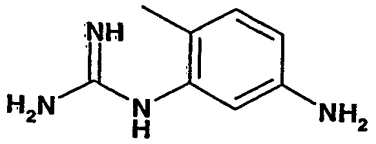
or an N-oxide or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof;

which process comprises preparing a compound of formula VIII by reacting a compound of formula VI with a compound of formula VII according to the following scheme



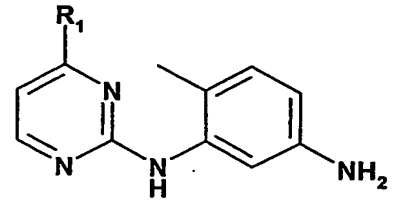
VI VII VIII

32. A compound of formula VII



VII

33. A compound of formula VIII



(VIII)

wherein R_1 is a phenyl radical or a heteroaryl radical.

34. A compound of the formula